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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000567

SENSITIVE  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO DETAINMENT OF  
YOUTH ACTIVISTS

REF: A. BAKU 557  
[1](#)B. BAKU 366  
[1](#)C. BAKU 526

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Since the arrest and jailing of Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, two well-known Azerbaijani youth activists, the NGO community has united in effort to gain their release as well as to protect others from a similar fate. Like the recent controversy over the NGO law and the government's extremely measured response to the April 30 slayings at the State Oil Academy, this issue has galvanized the usually fractious civil society groups. However, due to the nature of the presumed set-up of Milli and Hajizade, there is a perceptible fear among NGO leaders, especially youth leaders, that they are in increasing danger of arrest if they continue their criticism. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) At approximately 19:00, July 8, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade were attacked by two brawny individuals in a downtown Baku restaurant (reftel A). All four were detained but the two attackers were released within hours. Milli and Hajizade each sustained injuries in the confrontation. Subsequent claims that the attackers were hospitalized with injuries appear to be false, as no evidence of their registration at any Baku hospital exists.

[1](#)3. (U) Prior to Milli and Hajizade's pre-trial hearing at the Sabayel district court on July 9, German ombudsman for Human Rights, Gunter Nooke, who was in Baku on a scheduled trip, met with the judge as well as briefly spoke with Milli at the Sabayel police station. (Note: Milli was originally hired to be Nooke's translator prior to this arrest. End Note.) During Milli and Nooke's brief conversation (in German), Milli was able to explain much of the story. Nooke was the only foreign diplomat who was allowed to speak to any court official. Ultimately, the two were charged with "hooliganism" and given two months pre-trial detention with the potential of a five year sentence. The steep potential sentence is due to their prosecution under a law pertaining to hooliganism by "groups;" however they are being tried separately. They are currently being held in the recently built pre-trial detention facility known as Kurdahane. Reportedly, their conditions are relatively good and they are able to meet with their lawyers and human rights activists who have been providing them with food and messages.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY REACTS  
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[1](#)4. (U) On July 11, Embassy Baku released a press statement expressing concerns over the welfare of the two youths as

well as some of the irregularities of the investigation and detainment. Deputy Secretary Steinberg also made reference to these concerns in response to a question posed to him during a press conference related to his trip to Baku. European embassies and multilateral organizations are actively advocating on the activists, behalf. At a July 13 event, a POLECON officer talked to counterparts from various European Union-member embassies. The consensus was that they would all first attempt private demarches before making public statements if the initial private attempts failed.

#### THE AZERBAIJANI NGO COMMUNITY REACTS

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5.(U) On July 9, human rights defender Leyla Yunus, along with nearly every traditional opposition leader, held a press conference demanding the release of Milli and Hajizade. Calling the arrests politically motivated and "an attack on our youth," with reference to Hajizade's father, a member of the independence-era government, Yunus distributed a letter to be signed by those in attendance and presented to the President. Isa Qambar, head of the main opposition Yeni Musavat Party, also spoke saying that the government was attempting to split the opposition and that they should rather join together in defending the two youths.

6.(U) On July 13, a POLECON officer met with two members of the Dalga youth movement to announce the formation of a new movement called the Youth Rights Protection Movement (YRPM). YRPM was formed on July 11 in direct response to the

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detention of Hajizade and Milli. A general fear that the GOAJ would come after them next was another catalyst for the formation of this group. They had set up meetings with representatives of the major European embassies in Baku to announce their formation. So far their activities have been limited mainly to the internet but they plan to print t-shirts with Hajizade's and Milli's faces. The group also attempted to organize a small picket in London during President Aliyev's state visit.

7.(U) Also on July 13, the Institute for Reporter's Freedom and Safety held a press conference at their Baku headquarters. Along with well-known NGO leaders, a number of witnesses to the attacks were on hand. The goal of the gathered group of NGO leaders was to provide weekly updates on the well-being, legal status and activities in support of Milli and Hajizade. At the meeting, many stated the consensus belief that the attack was in response to the two for the production of a widely spread YouTube video mocking the government's purchase of two donkeys from Germany for \$41,000 each.

8.(SBU) A strategy meeting was held by a number of youth groups On July 14 at the Human Rights House funded by the Norwegian government. There was definitely a palpable sense of unease among many of the leaders gathered. The main topic discussed was the need for unity and ability to work together between the groups. However, while they were told that they should do as much as possible, it was also noted that they should be careful and protect themselves. Despite the talk of unity, there was still some derision. One leader, Rahmin Najili, formerly of Dalga but now of the Youth Rights Protection Movement criticized an article in opposition newspaper Yeni Musavat, to which he was met with indignation by some present. This article, which was rumored to have been written under political order from the GOAJ, suggested that the U.S. Government was plotting coup attempts in Azerbaijan through youth groups.

#### GOAJ REACTION

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19. (SBU) Further, the Prosecutor General's Office and

Ministry of Internal Affairs issued a joint statement July 14 that criticized international organizations and foreign embassies for their interest in the youths' case. Among other things, the statement said that foreigners are questioning the GOAJ in its ability to conduct a fair investigation and warned embassies to steer clear of interfering in internal matters. The joint statement appeared to be in response to Embassy Baku's statement of concern about the case, released July 11.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Hajizade and Milli,s arrest and detention appear to be retribution for their increasingly public and pointed criticisms of the government, including protests of the government,s expensive commemoration of Heydar Aliyev,s birthday in the wake of the April 30 mass murder at the State Oil Academy, and the now-infamous donkey video. However, the timing of the event to coincide with the visit of a European human rights ombudsman ) and curious facts such as Milli,s having to call the police to spur their involvement, followed by the confusion at the police station leading up to the preliminary hearing ) leave it unclear at what level and in whose interest the provocation was carried out. Regardless, it appears that the government may be trying to scare youth leaders and force them to think twice before conducting any activities that could be seen as anti-government. Over the longer term, this incident, combined with civil society's strong reaction to proposed amendments to the NGO law last month (reftel c), may signify the end of the era of traditional Popular Front-era opposition figures and the beginning of a new era of a younger, more dynamic opposition.

Embassy intends to continue raising the case with officials in the Presidential Administration and to refute claims by both the government and the opposition press that the United States is inappropriately involved in the case.

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